

Jefferson County Roads

By: Chris Campbell

County roads are safer and smoother, but there remains much work to be done.

That was the message U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, D- St. Louis, brought to a group of civic leaders and state Department of Transportation (MoDOT) officials assembled at Festus City Hall Monday for a roundtable discussion on future county road improvements.

Earlier this year, Carnahan helped pass the federal transportation bill, which provides approximately \$21 million in funds for Jefferson County roads.

Carnahan said this figure represents an increase of nearly 30 percent from the previous bill, about half of the funds allocated to Carnahan's district.

"Frankly, Jefferson County is the area of greatest need," Carnahan said.

Audience members raised several questions about future road projects, including the possibility of expanding Highway 21 to De Soto.

Judy Wagner, area MoDOT engineer, said any work to begin that expansion prior to 2030 would be unlikely without additional funding.

Pevely Mayor John Knobloch spoke in favor of more funding for area roads in order to accommodate the county's rapid growth and provide for safer roads.

"We have officers out there every day and there are constant tie-ups and accidents," he told the panel. "I think it's a shame that to get something done you have to have fatalities. Why do we have to wait until we have x number of fatalities? Somehow we need funding for the more heavily populated areas."

Carnahan responded that such "pressure points" should be identified and addressed.

"We have a limited pot of money so we need to be creative," he said.

Knobloch also initiated a discussion on the prevalence of sound walls buffering subdivisions off Interstate 55. Knobloch said spending money on noise reduction for homeowners should be low on the state's priority list.

"Where's the priority, sound walls or lives?" he asked the panel. "Do we want to put up more sound walls or save lives?"

Carnahan agreed.

"To me, that's an obvious choice and we'll look into it," he said."

Presiding Commissioner Mark Mertens said the county is already eyeing possible projects for the next transportation bill and is preparing to draft a transportation master plan to guide future projects.

"I expect to have a proposal ready by the end of the month," Mertens said. "The master plan will be mostly for highways and roadways but we will look at mass transit and airports."

Mertens cited several roads he believes merit close attention, including Highways MM, 21 and

W.